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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000562

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2014

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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN ARMENIA: THE VIEW FROM
THE PROCURATOR'S OFFICE

REF: YEREVAN 171

Classified By: DCM WALKER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Through an Advisor to the Minister of Justice, we have obtained a copy of a report on trafficking in persons (TIP) in Armenia prepared by the Office of the Procurator General. The detail and scope of the report's findings, along with recent Embassy demarches on Armenia's shaky Tier II status, should prompt the GOAM to take more decisive ownership of the TIP problem. The report also reveals local law enforcement's surprisingly proactive and productive efforts in the fight against TIP. Details of the report to the Minister of Justice follow.

Trafficking in Persons from Armenia

¶2. (C) Law enforcement has identified the U.A.E. as the primary country of destination for Armenian victims of trafficking. As a result, law enforcement has focused its efforts on trafficking rings working out of Dubai and has stepped up efforts in the cities of Yerevan, Vanadzor and Kapan as well as in Syunik Marz (region)-- the major points of origin for trafficked victims in Armenia.

¶3. (C) The report indicates that because securing visas for unmarried women under 30 for the U.A.E. is difficult, ring leaders often use stolen passports or false marriages to facilitate entry to the U.A.E. Traffickers arrange travel for groups of women to the U.A.E. at their (traffickers') expense. Upon arrival in Dubai, the women are expected to generate USD 6,000 to 10,000 to repay their debt; subsequent revenue is later to be split 50/50. Once in Dubai, the women's passports are collected and their movements controlled. Armenian Prosecutors believe that trafficking rings are creating pyramids, whereby initially recruited women begin recruiting for the ring in exchange for being relieved of the obligation to split proceeds 50/50 with the ringleaders. The Armenian Prosecutor alleges that traffickers tell women returning to Armenia that they will likely be "shaken down" by airport officials and that their earnings will therefore be transferred to them in Armenia via Western Union. Very often funds are never transferred.

¶4. (C) Currently, there are two suspects in custody in Armenia who are believed to be involved in trafficking women to Dubai. The Office of the Procurator General (OPG) has amassed extensive information on suspected victims, their aliases and false passport information; ringleaders have also been identified. OPG has forwarded information about the traffickers to their counterparts in Dubai with a request that the suspected ringleaders be detained. OPG is optimistic that the leader of this trafficking ring will be arrested and returned to Armenia; however, Dubai officials have not yet acted on this request.

¶5. (C) The report further indicates that Dubai authorities have requested that Armenian law enforcement travel to Dubai to collaborate on the case. The Interagency Commission to Address Issues Related to Human Trafficking indicated that plans to travel to Dubai were postponed because information regarding the trip was reportedly leaked; however, law enforcement officials are hopeful that they will be able to travel to Dubai soonest.

¶6. (C) Concern in Armenia over trafficking of Armenians to Turkey is increasing. A local NGO that has been providing assistance to victims of trafficking in Armenia since December 2003 reports that it has assisted a man who was trafficked to Turkey via Georgia to be exploited for construction work in Istanbul. The victim was able to return with the help of the Russian Consulate in Istanbul and reported to the NGO that he is aware of other victims still in Turkey. Furthermore, an ongoing Armenian law enforcement investigation has uncovered a trafficking ring working in Turkey. The Office of the Procurator General anticipates arrests in the very near future.

Trafficking in Persons through Armenia

17. (C) Since 2002, Armenian law enforcement officials have been investigating at least one trafficking ring operating between Central Asia and the U.A.E. via the Caucasus. Prior to the cancellation in March 2003 of the Tashkent-Yerevan flight, women reportedly were brought from Uzbekistan to Armenia and then sent on to Dubai. Following the cancellation of the flight, the route has changed: Uzbek women are allegedly transported to Georgia, cross the land border into Armenia and then sent on to Dubai. (NOTE: There is a direct Yerevan-Dubai flight operated by the local airline. END NOTE.)

18. (C) OPG believes that trafficking rings operating out of Central Asia are comprised of Armenians with Uzbek citizenship and Armenians with Georgian citizenship. The ring's activities are allegedly supported by extended family that provide transport, housing, etc. in return for compensation. One prosecutor has indicated that the ring's activities may extend even farther-- at least one of the Uzbek victims has traveled to Southeast Asia, the U.A.E. and most recently Armenia. The Prosecutor's office believes that the ring also maintains a travel business (name not disclosed) in Georgia, which organizes theft of Georgian passports for use by the women.

19. (C) Recently, 8 Uzbek women were freed from their traffickers by law enforcement and referred to a local NGO in Yerevan for safehaven and assistance (reftel). Three alleged traffickers-- Armenians with Uzbek citizenship, are in custody and an investigation is ongoing. Relatives of the traffickers believed to be still located in Uzbekistan recruited the 8 women separately; the women traveled to Yerevan on their own passports via Moscow. OPG reports that the traffickers intended to send the women to Dubai after obtaining fraudulent travel documents in Armenia. OPG believes that intense law enforcement efforts impeded the trafficker's ability to obtain false passports for the 8 women and plans to travel to Dubai were cancelled. The women and OPG reported that the traffickers set them up to work as elite prostitutes in high-end saunas and small hotels in Armenia and began, what turned out for the traffickers to be, a booming business in Yerevan.

10. (C) Comment: The Advisor to the Minister of Justice, who has excellent contacts throughout the GOAM, has effectively raised concerns about Armenia's TIP record with the Foreign Minister, Justice Minister and Presidency. His discussions with the Office of the Procurator General indicate (and the report confirms) that at the law enforcement level, TIP is being taken very seriously. In the months to come, we will be watching to see whether the higher levels of the GOAM are prepared to take full, public ownership of this problem.
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